

## **AUSTRIAN ECO-LABEL**

### **Introduction**

The Austrian Eco-Label was created in 1991 on the initiative of the Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family Affairs (BMUJF). The Eco-Label is a voluntary, seal-of-approval, targeted to both consumers and manufacturers. It is designed to draw consumers' attention to products and services that are "more environmentally friendly as compared to the very harmful effects inflicted by other products fulfilling the same function" (Umweltbundesamt, 1994). The program also seeks to motivate producers and traders to "develop and offer less environmentally-polluting products" (Umweltbundesamt, 1994). In addition to evaluating the environmental impacts of a product, the Eco-Label also certifies the quality of the product, ensuring "a high environmental standard without having to fear a loss of quality or safety" (Umweltbundesamt, 1994).

As of August 1997, product criteria have been developed for 34 product categories under the Austrian Eco-Label. Since 1996, new product categories include tourism, carpets, papers for magazines, and office chairs. Currently, there are a total of 150 products that have been awarded the eco-label, and ten foreign companies that carry the Austrian Eco-Label on their products.

### **Recent Developments**

Austria's ecolabeling scheme operates in conjunction with the European Union's (EU) ecolabeling program. The EU label, however, is not seen as a substitute for the Austrian label. In fact, "as long as product-related market shares and technology developments differ strongly within the large market areas like the EU, we [Austria] are of the firm opinion that it cannot be wise to reject national schemes" (Jakl, 1997). Although criteria for product groups developed under the EU ecolabeling scheme may be integrated into national ecolabeling programs, the EU Eco-label is not be a precondition for receiving the Austrian Eco-Label.

### **Program Summary**

BMUJF, the Federal Environmental Agency (UBA), the Austrian Consumer Association (VKI), and the Austrian Association for the Promotion of Quality (ARGE) are the four primary organizations responsible for administering the Austrian Eco-Label program. The ARGE administers and coordinates with manufacturers wishing to obtain the ecolabel. The other three organizations are involved with criteria development. In addition, several groups -- the Eco-Label Advisory Board and the "expert groups"(one for each product category) -- have been established to assist in the award process. Members of the Advisory Board and the "expert groups" include individuals from the four administering bodies, as well as people from environmental protection organizations, manufacturing, trade associations, consumer protection organizations, and individual experts.

Product categories are proposed to the ARGE by manufacturers, institutions, and other interest groups. ARGE then prepares a summary of the proposals for BMUJF. Based on assessments of the proposed product groups' overall environmental impacts, the BMUJF decides which product categories will be pursued for the Eco-Label. Once product categories have been selected, the Federal Environmental Agency, the BMUJF, and the Consumer Association jointly develop and propose product criteria. Chaired by the Austrian Consumer Association (VKI), an expert group (with representatives from a wide range of stakeholder organizations) is responsible for discussing proposed criteria and coming to a unanimous decision in passing a draft set of environmental criteria for each product group.

The Eco-labeling Advisory Group approves the draft, which is then subject to a final examination by the Federal Environmental Agency, who approves the product criteria. The criteria are then authorized by the Minister for the Environment and published in the official Federal Environmental Agency gazette, the *Wiener Zeitung*. Usually, criteria are valid for three years unless there has been a major technology revision, in which case criteria may be reviewed before the three years are over. If no manufacturer applies for an ecolabel in a given product group, criteria for that product group may be withdrawn or altered prior to the three years.

The Austrian Eco-Label may be awarded to both products and services and is open to both domestic and foreign producers, who submit applications to ARGE. If the manufacturer is in compliance with the product criteria, a "label utilization contract" is awarded by BMUJF and signed by the producer. Each product label may be used for two years, after which it is eligible for renewal. There is an annual fee for use of the label, which varies depending on the sales of the product; the fee can range from ATS 2,000 (\$160.00 US) to an upper limit of ATS 25,000 (\$2,000.00 US). If a breach of contract is found, BMUJF has the right to prohibit further use of the label, either temporarily or permanently.

## **Program Methodology**

Product categories are proposed by manufacturers, institutions, and other interest groups to ARGE. Product categories are selected through an evaluation of the environmental impacts of the categories, as well as by stakeholder votes or a legislative body's votes. The program reports, however, that it does not conduct an environmental impact analysis when selecting product categories or in establishing product criteria.

When developing product criteria, the Austria Eco-Label program conducts a life-cycle assessment. In setting its criteria Austria Eco-Label collects information from previous literature and studies pertaining to the product categories, other programs' LCAs, independent testing and auditing, and information from the manufacturers themselves. Products are assessed on an "all-embracing and unified evaluation" of not only the environmental effects of product use but also on the following factors: relative consumption of raw materials and energy during the production process, toxicity of the product's contents, wastes generated during manufacturing as well as disposal, recyclability; quality and safety of the product, usability of the product, and durability

and ease of repair of the product. Additionally, Austria assesses product categories on other factors such as occupational health, human health impacts, the use of animal testing, and general compliance with health, safety and environmental regulations in the country. Austria Eco-Label reports that it does not use SETAC guidelines in its life-cycle assessment.

## **Other Information**

During the past year, Austria Eco-Label has participated in discussions with other European countries to try to harmonize national ecolabeling programs in Europe. Preliminary pilot projects have been established to try to develop unified product categories for three pilot product categories -- vacuum cleaners, coffee machines, and furniture. The aims of this pilot project are to 1) identify the critical steps in the criteria development process (which could lead to mutual recognition among programs); 2) establish what the key elements are in criteria development; and 3) to establish mutually-recognized testing procedures among participating countries.

## **References**

Bundesministerium für Umwelt, 1996, *Fact Sheet*, “*Certified Products.*”

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Umweltbundesamt, 1994, *The Austrian Eco-Label* (Booklet).

Dr. Thomas Jakl, Bundesministerium für Umwelt, personal communication with Abt Associates, July/August 1997.

Austrian Federal Ministry for Environment, Youth and Family. *Austria’s Approach to Environmental Labeling*. Website address:  
[www.bmu.gv.at/bmu/bmu/fachinfo/wum/UWZEnglish.html](http://www.bmu.gv.at/bmu/bmu/fachinfo/wum/UWZEnglish.html).

## **Product Categories**

### *Final Categories*

- Refrigerators and freezers
- Sanitary paper and tissues made of recycled paper
- Varnishes and paints
- Recycled paper for writing, copying, and EDP purposes (fine paper)
- Filing systems made of recycled paper
- Exercise books made from recycled paper
- Household washing machines
- Wood and wooded materials for indoor building purposes
- Wooden furniture

Water-soluble varnishes for wooden floors  
Water-saving toilet flush tanks for non-chlorinated plastic materials  
Individual electronic controls for sanitary facilities  
Reprocessing of ink media (toner-modules, ribbon cassettes, ink cartridges)  
Saw-chain oil and lubricants  
Copying machines  
Solar collectors  
Wall paints  
Products made from recycled paper (e.g., envelopes, etc.)  
Detergents for dishwashers  
Detergents for manual use  
Textile detergents  
Printing paper for newspapers mainly made of waste paper  
Total chlorine free bleached paper, made from virgin fiber, for non-impact printing (e.g., inkjet and high speed laser printers)  
Low pollutant print products (publications)  
Wood-based playground equipment for outdoor use  
Compostable paper bags for biogenic waste  
Tickets for public transport (Go-for-the-Environment Tickets)  
Returnable bottles for beverages and liquids  
Compostments for cemeteries (e.g., compostable flower arrangements, etc.)  
Kitchen rolls, paper towels and cleaning cloths made out of recycled paper  
Cleaning agents  
Tourism enterprises (e.g., hotels, restaurants, etc.)  
Carpets  
Paper made from recycled materials for magazines  
Office Chairs

*Categories Under Consideration*

Thermal insulation  
Heating systems  
Energy supplying systems